# BAPE - Phase 3 Submissions
# Mistissini, November 13
# Thomas Neeposh

Wachiya! My name is Thomas Neeposh. I am here today to make this submission on behalf of the Grand Council of the Crees.

I would like to take this opportunity to welcome the BAPE back to Mistissini. We are pleased to have you here with us once again. As you know, the issue of uranium development is extremely important to Mistissini. This community is, after all, ground zero for uranium development in Eeyou Istchee and in Quebec.

Although I know you have a very busy schedule, I hope you have a few moments during your time here to look around you and appreciate the beauty of Eeyou Istchee. I encourage you to look around you, and to get a sense of how beautiful and vast this land truly is. Perhaps you will begin to understand what compels us to keep fighting against uranium development in our territory.

Respect for the land is the cornerstone of Cree culture. It is our love for this land that keeps us fighting so hard. We are responsible for this land. We are the stewards of this land. Eeyou Istchee is Cree for “The People’s Land”, and our love for this land is truly at the core of who we are as a People. The land has been handed down for our care, and we are just borrowing it from future generations to come. This is what we learned from our parents, and what we teach to our children. This is the message that we hope to impart to you in these hearings.

During the second phase of your mandate, you listened to experts and ministry representatives. Now, you are taking the time to listen to the people. I believe that this is the most important part of your mandate so far. We know that you take this part of your mandate seriously.

Because the decision of whether or not to allow uranium mining in Quebec must reflect the views of those who will be directly affected by it. It must reflect the views of those who will deal with the health and environmental effects. It must reflect the views of those who will be impacted if a tailings pond should leak, and who will have no choice but to clean it up if it does.

In Eeyou Istchee, this means that the decision of whether to develop uranium mines must reflect the views of the people who live here, the Crees of Eeyou Istchee.

This was the approach the Cree Nation took when it decided to ban uranium mining on its territory. When Strateco began its exploration project in the Otish Mountains, on Mistissini's family hunting grounds, Mistissini's leaders approached their people. Because it is us, the people, who will be affected. It is us who must ultimately deal with the effects. The Cree Nation of Mistissini listened closely to what the people had to say – the elders, women, youth, trappers, teachers and health care providers in the community. And the answer amongst the Crees of Mistissini was resounding: we oppose uranium mining in Eeyou Istchee.

Back then, the Cree Nation listened to what the experts had to say. We also listened to what they didn't say, and the questions they could not answer. During the BAPE's hearings in September, we listened again. And here is what we heard both times: there are many unknowns. Much about the risks associated with uranium development remains unknown and uncertain.

We know with certainty that the wastes produced by uranium mining are highly toxic and radioactive, and will remain dangerous for thousands of years. We know with certainty that these wastes will be left behind at the mining site. We know with certainty that there have been serious problems with the tailings containment structures that have been used in many past and existing uranium projects.

We are told that these known risks should not concern us. But when we have pressed the experts, we have come to understand that the footings for their confident pronouncements are in fact very limited. The health risks for local populations are largely unknown – there haven't been enough studies to say with any certainty that those living near uranium mining projects will not encounter health problems. There is not enough information to know the extent of those health problems. But we do know that local communities are likely to suffer many negative psychological effects when they live close to a uranium mine. How can we be sure that uranium mining won't make us sick? How can we be sure that our children's health won't be at risk? How can we be sure that our land will not be polluted?

The environmental risks and the risks to wildlife are also unknown. Mining projects in Saskatchewan have created higher than expected levels of radon and other radioactive elements in surrounding areas. They have found high levels of selenium in fish, a toxic substance that isn't even regulated because the law-makers didn't know enough to identify it as toxic! How can we be sure that our water will not become contaminated? How can we be sure that the animals and fish that we eat won't be made toxic?

The stability of current isolation and containment methods is also unknown. The Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission has tried to convince us that the new containment methods are safe and foolproof. But we do not have even one example – in Canada or elsewhere in the world – of these methods actually working for as long as we need them to! The CNSC relies on models and projections of future events to reassure us that their methods are safe. But these models don't account for unpredictable weather events. You can't predict the unpredictable! This is particularly true in the context of climate change. Since no one knows what the future holds, these projections aren't worth much. How can we be sure that the dykes, dams or ponds won't leak? How can we be sure that the surrounding environment won't become contaminated if they do?

What <u>is</u> known is that insufficient funds are put aside by the mining companies to deal with the long-term maintenance of dykes, dams and tailings ponds. Even less is put aside to deal with the effects of those dykes, dams and tailings ponds when an unforeseen disaster occurs.

The Mount Polley tailings spill in B.C. was devastating for the local environment and the local communities that live off that environment. It was built by educated, qualified engineers, much like those who will build the dams, dykes or ponds for uranium tailings. Those engineers used models and projections. It was subject to strict regulations. And the Mount Polley dam still failed. And now it is projected to cost anywhere between $50 million and $500 million to clean up the resulting mess. The amounts that the company had to set aside won't come close to covering those costs.

So who will be left to foot the bill for clean-up costs and maintenance of uranium mines in the North? Us, the Crees of Eeyou Istchee. Because when the government sues the mining company and fights in a courtroom in the South about who should be held responsible, it is the local community who is stuck with the mess. When the government cuts corners because there is no room in its budget to cover "unforeseen costs", it is the local community who must clean it up.

That is why it is the voice of the people that must be heard. If uranium mining goes forward, it is us, the Crees of Eeyou Istchee, who will be left with the legacy of uranium mining. It won't be the mining companies, who will come to Eeyou Istchee to remove the precious ore, and then leave once they've made their profits. It won't be the government, whose promises are often easily forgotten. It will be us, who have lived here since time immemorial. It will be us, who continue to hunt, trap and fish on this land. It will be us, who wish to pass down to our children and our children's children the important practices that our parents taught us. It will be us who

will be left to deal with the long-term risks. And so it is our voice that must be heard.

Meegwetch – thank you – merci.